

LETTERS †

Concerning Social Security Representatives That Physicians Must Register If They Give Emergency Professional Services for Colleagues:

(COPY)

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Room 1331, 450 Sutter Street
San Francisco 8, California

Paul C. Barton, M.D.,
Executive Officer,
Procurement and Assignment Service,
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Doctor Barton:

Recently a great deal of disturbance and interference with the practice of medicine in the case of several busy practitioners has been brought about by the agents of the United States Treasury Department, Bureau of Internal Revenue. This sounds pretty ominous, I know, but it is also serious, and to me, inexcusable.

A Miss Anne Dunn, whose chief I believe is Mr. Albert Sellinger of the Bureau of Internal Revenue, 100 McAllister Street, San Francisco, California, has recently been interviewing certain doctors, and I believe it is contemplated that they are going to canvass the whole field, with a view to determining whether these doctors are paying any other physician for taking care of his patients during his vacation, or during an emergency when he is unavailable through any reason whatsoever. These agents state that if a doctor compensates a confrere for visiting one of his patients in the middle of the night, or when he is on vacation, the doctor who makes the visit must register under Social Security, must pay a certain amount of money for this fee, and that the doctor for whom he has performed this service and who has reimbursed him must also pay a certain sum to Social Security. I have given you this simple case, which is an actual case, in order to show how far certain departments in the Government are reducing certain laws to absurdity. It means that at this time, of all times, when every physician is practically killing himself to take care of the civilian population, that for the sake of carrying out some theory to the 'nth degree, the physician is now being asked to go through a great deal of time-consuming work in order to satisfy some crackpot regulation which was never meant to cover these cases and is only cutting down and interfering with the medical care of the civilian population. The probable actual number of dollars and cents is so little as to be meaningless. Furthermore, practically every physician who makes an emergency call for another physician or takes care of certain patients for a physician who is sick or even on vacation to keep from being sick, has his own practice, is self-employed and does not wish to be registered under Social Security or take the necessary time and carry the necessary bookkeeping, and make out the forms necessary to carry on such an absurd program.

The above does not apply to physicians who are hiring assistant M.D.'s on a salary basis for full or part time work. Such cases very conceivably come under the intent of the Social Security regulations and there is no objection to this. The absurdity lies in carrying this to such an intolerable degree. I do not know whether this procedure here in San Francisco is based on a national direction or whether it is possibly the idea of some local sub-department head, but I believe that it is to the inter-

est of the Procurement and Assignment Service and to the medical profession to determine this.

I do not know of any profession that is taking the beating because of the number of members in the military forces, that the medical profession is. It has become absolutely necessary for doctors to spell and relieve one another in order to, in any way, maintain their own health and efficiency during this emergency. Many of us are taking care of the practices of other physicians while they are in service, and reimbursing them for a percentage of the income received from their patients. This is a pure partnership basis. Similarly, many physicians are taking night calls or week-end calls on a rotational basis while their confreres are absent. Remuneration for this is also on a partnership basis in the individual case. If now, in addition to doing their utmost to cover this emergency situation, the Treasury Department is going to throw a lot of extra work on the medical profession in order to dot an *i* in an isolated sentence, to comply with someone's interpretation of an otherwise good law, we, in this country, are certainly in for a bad time.

It is my request and suggestion that the Central Board in Washington immediately investigate the source and authority and reasons for the above procedure on the part of the local, if not national, department of Internal Revenue, with a view to obtaining some means of relief for the medical profession. If persisted in, this is going to, and as a matter of fact is, interfering with the efforts of Procurement and Assignment Service and the efforts of the medical profession which is doing such a noble job during these trying times. Already I am having doctors call me up saying that they will not make any more calls for other physicians if they have to go through all this red tape, because they are performing an act which is helping out a physician, which they are in no way obligated to do. Although I have not been approached personally, I imagine that I will be in the near future. I can only say this, that several confreres have realized that I was giving my time to War Manpower at a terrific financial and physical sacrifice and they have gladly and patriotically released me of night calls during this emergency and during the absence of my brother who is in the Navy. In a great many cases I have reimbursed these physicians for covering me in these emergencies, paying them either all or part of the fee which I have collected from the patient who was glad to have this physician in my absence. If I have to now go back through my books for the last two years and ferret the exact sums of money which I have paid on individual cases, and have to fill out Social Security forms for these various physicians, and if these various physicians are forced to take out Social Security numbers and go through similar red tape of reporting these fees, I will certainly have to not only resign from Procurement and Assignment Service, so that I may work for Social Security, but I will also immediately give up any attempt to cover my patients through making available to them the services of other physicians.

I would appreciate your reactions and the reactions of the Central Board regarding the above, and I would also request that you investigate and inform me as to what the future holds regarding it.

With kindest regards, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

HAROLD A. FLETCHER, M.D.,

*California State Chairman for Physicians
Procurement and Assignment Service.*

(Medical Jurisprudence. Concluded from p. 227)

Accident Commission approved a surcharge of 15 per cent over the existing fee schedule effective August 1, 1944. This order of the Industrial Accident Commission will be discussed more at length in the next issue.

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